

LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: The Petroleum Building

OWNERS: CS HPB, LLC

APPLICANTS: Tara Worthey, 1314 Member, LLC

LOCATION: 1314 Texas Street – SSBB

AGENDA ITEM: B

HPO FILE NO.: 17L322

DATE ACCEPTED: 9/5/2017

HAHC HEARING DATE: 9/21/2017

SITE INFORMATION: Lots 1 – 5 & 12, Tract 11, Block 72, SSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a 174,000 square foot twenty-two story commercial masonry building.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Petroleum Building at 1314 Texas Street is a Mayan influenced, twenty-two story commercial building built ca. 1927 and designed by Alfred C. Bossom in collaboration with Maurice J. Sullivan, and the firm Briscoe & Dixon. Bossom, a New York architect born and trained in England, argued that the Mayan stepped pyramids of Central America should serve as an indigenous model for the American skyscraper. While the Petroleum Building has the limestone base and brown brick-face shaft characteristic of 1920s Houston skyscrapers, it also features Mayan relief figures protruding from the spandrel panels above the arched second-floor windows and more abstract pre-Columbian decoration in the spandrels of its three setback stages. Construction of the building was conceived by prominent Houston oilman Joseph S. Cullinan as an opportunity to bring under a single roof multiple companies involved in the burgeoning petroleum industry near the Texas Coast. The project was underwritten by the Petroleum Building Company, a J.S. Cullinan holding, which was headed by Thomas P. Lee. Upon completion, the Petroleum Building housed upwards of twenty oil companies under the umbrella of the American Republics Corporation. Tenants of the building included Houston Natural Gas, Halliburton, and Fidelity Trust Company. In addition to the oil interests, the twenty-first floor was the long-time home of the famous Tejas Club, a group of about fifty young, prominent men. The Petroleum Building was one of Bossom's last works before returning to England in 1926, where he began a new life in public service entirely detached from architectural practice. After several decades, the building name was changed to the Great Southwest Life Building to reflect its new tenants, the Great Southwest Life Insurance Company, when the company moved their offices from Dallas to Houston in 1980. The building was purchased by Choice Hotels International in 2016 and will be redeveloped into a hotel.

The Petroleum Building at 1314 Texas Street meets Criteria 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8 for Landmark Designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Petroleum Building

Prior to the start of construction in 1925, the site of the Petroleum Building at 1314 Texas Street was almost exclusively residential, but the area was in transition as downtown Houston grew and developed. The project was underwritten by the Petroleum Building Company, a J.S Cullinan holding, which was headed by Thomas P. Lee. Upon completion, the Petroleum Building housed upwards of twenty associated oil companies under the umbrella of the American Republics Corporation. Other tenants included Houston Natural Gas, Halliburton, and Fidelity Trust Company, of which Lee was a director. Cullinan and his son, Craig, who replaced Lee after he resigned from the American Republics Corporation, occupied offices on the twentieth floor. Originally designed as a lunch room for the employees of Cullinan's company, by 1929 the twenty-first floor was occupied by the newly formed Tejas Club. The club declared its purpose to be "the maintenance of comfortable quarters for the association of mutually agreeable personnel; the pursuit and furtherance of such literary and artistic undertakings as may be deemed suitable and convenient; and the study and preservation of the historic traditions of Texas." For several decades, the Petroleum Building was one of the most influential hubs of the oil and gas industry in Texas. The building name was changed to the Great Southwest Life Building to reflect its new tenants, the Great Southwest Life Insurance Company, when the company moved their offices from Dallas to Houston in 1980. The building was purchased by Choice Hotels International in 2016 and will be redeveloped into a hotel.

Joseph S. Cullinan

Joseph Stephen Cullinan was born near Sharon, Pennsylvania, on December 31, 1860. He began working in the Pennsylvania oilfields at the age of fourteen where he learned to perform virtually every task associated with oil production. He joined Standard Oil in 1882 and throughout his tenure held several managerial positions within the company. He left Standard Oil in 1895 to found his own company, Petroleum Iron Works, which manufactured steel storage tanks. Cullinan moved to Corsicana, Texas, in 1894, at the behest of local developers, to advise them on marketing and production techniques. While in Corsicana, he organized the J.S. Cullinan Company, which later became the Magnolia Petroleum Company in 1911.

Cullinan moved his operations to Beaumont shortly after the Spindletop discovery in 1901. He formed the Texas Company, later Texaco, in Beaumont in 1902. Cullinan moved his operations to Houston in 1905, which established the city as the focal point of the oil industry in the southwest. He was president of the company until 1913 when he lost control of the stock in a proxy fight with eastern investors, but remained active in the industry even after his resignation. Cullinan, along with Thomas P. Lee, James L. Autry, Will C. Hogg, and E.F. Woodward formed the American Republics Corporation in 1916, which later controlled twenty-one subsidiaries involved in all facets of the oil industry: prospecting, production, refining, and transportation, as well as manufacturing ships, tank cars, and oil tools. In addition to his role in the business community, Cullinan was also an important figure in philanthropy in Houston. He was a patron of the Houston Symphony, Museum of Fine Arts (Houston), and Houston Negro Hospital. Cullinan died of pneumonia on March 11, 1937 in Palo Alto, California, while visiting friends.

Thomas P. Lee

Thomas Peter Lee was born in West Virginia on March 19, 1871. He left school at the age of sixteen to work in the oilfields in his home state, later moving to Ohio. In 1903 Lee moved to Saratoga, Texas, and began working for the Texas Company. It was here that he forged a relationship with J.S. Cullinan. By the time he left the company ten years later, he had attained the position of general superintendent of production. In 1916, Lee partnered with Joseph S. Cullinan, James Autry, Will C. Hogg, and E.F. Woodward to organize the American Republics Corporation, which later controlled twenty-one subsidiaries involved in all facets of the oil industry: prospecting, production, refining, and transportation, as well as manufacturing ships, tank cars, and oil tools. In addition to serving on the board of directors, Lee also held the position of vice president in charge of production. Lee was also the president of the Petroleum Building Company, the entity that developed the Petroleum Building, and was very active in the design and construction of the building.

Lee resigned from the American Republics Corporation several years later after a bitter stock war in which Cullinan emerged the victor. Cullinan not only defeated Lee in the struggle, but he put his own son Craig into Lee's position as vice president. Lee went on to invest in a new enterprise that came to be known as the Yount-Lee Company, one of the most successful independent oil producers of its day. Yount-Lee went on to drill numerous deep-flank oil wells in both East Texas and Louisiana, and was responsible for the Second Spindletop boom in Beaumont. He was nominated for governor of Texas by the Republican Party in 1924, but refused the nomination. His home in Houston, the Link-Lee House, is a Recorded Texas Historical Landmark and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Lee died in Houston of a coronary occlusion on February 4, 1939.

Alfred C. Bossom

Alfred Charles Bossom was born in Islington, London, England, on October 16, 1881. He attended Regent Street Polytechnic and the Royal Academy where he trained as an architect. He traveled to the United States in 1903 to design a housing scheme in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, for Carnegie Steel Mills. His marriage to Emily Bayne, daughter of Samuel Bayne, president of National Seaboard Bank, New York, and owner of the second oil well drilled in the United States, undoubtedly influenced Bossom's evolving specialty in bank design and buildings for the petroleum industry, usually in the form of the skyscraper. Among his most notable buildings are:

- The American Exchange National Bank (New York, 1918)
- The Magnolia-Mobil Petroleum Building (Dallas, 1922)
- United States National Bank (Galveston, 1924)
- Maple Terrace Apartments (Dallas, 1924-1925)

- The Petroleum Building (Houston, 1925-1927)

Bossom and his wife were avid travelers. Prior to the construction of the Petroleum Building, Bossom traveled to Mexico and was taken with the designs of Mayan Architecture. New building codes developed in New York at the time mandated buildings of a certain height be stepped back at their tops to help preserve light and air for the street level, and Bossom determined that the forms of Mayan temples were perfect inspiration for new American high rises. His sketches, commentary, and photographs from his trip to Mexico were published by Charles Scribener in 1924 as *An Architectural Pilgrimage in Old Mexico*. His theories, philosophies, and methods are summarized in his book *Building to the Skies: The Romance of the Skyscraper* (1934) in which he identified the Mayan temple of Tikal as the original American skyscraper.

The Petroleum Building was one of Bossom's last works before returning to England in 1926. Bossom began a new life in public service, entirely detached from architectural practice. He was elected to Parliament as Conservative member for Maidstone, Kent in 1931, and served for twenty-eight years. He was made a baronet in 1953, was elected chairman of the Royal Society of Arts (1957-1959), and in 1960 was made life peer, taking as his title Lord Bossom of Maidstone. His enthusiasm for Texas was manifested in his leadership of the Anglo-Texan Society, of which he served as president from the mid-fifties until his death in London in 1965.

Maurice J. Sullivan

Maurice Joseph Sullivan was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on June 21, 1884. He attended Detroit College (1901-1903) and the University of Michigan (1904-1906) where he trained as a civil engineer. He moved to Texas to work as an engineer for the Fort Worth architecture firm Waller, Shaw and Field. He also worked for Waco architects Scott and Pearson. Sullivan moved to Houston in 1912. From 1912-1919, Sullivan was the city architect for the City of Houston. In 1919, he established his independent practice. Sullivan specialized in the design of churches, schools, convents, and hospitals for Catholic religious orders and institutions of the Diocese of Galveston (now Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston). Sullivan designed buildings with an eclectic style, and most frequently designed building in the Lombard Romanesque, Mediterranean, and Neo-Gothic styles. Among his most notable buildings are:

- Eastwood Elementary School (1916)
- St. Anne's Church and School (1929-1940)
- Houston Negro Hospital School of Nursing (1931)
- Holy Rosary Church (1933)
- St. Thomas High School (1940)
- St. Elizabeth Negro Hospital (1947)
- St. Mary's Seminary (1954)

Sullivan joined the American Institute of Architects in 1921, and was elected to the fellowship in 1951. He served as the President of the South Texas Chapter of the AIA in 1924 and 1933-1934. He served as AIA Treasurer from 1951-1954. He was the first Texas architect to be elected to national office within the AIA. Sullivan died in Houston on December 15, 1961.

Birdsall P. Briscoe

Birdsall Parmenas Briscoe was born in Harrisburg, Texas, on June 10, 1876. He was educated at Texas Agricultural and Mechanical College (now Texas A&M University), and the University of Texas, where he was a classmate of Will C. Hogg. He began his architectural career in 1904 in Houston as an apprentice with architects Lewis Wilson and Lewis Sterling Green. After a brief partnership with Green (1909-11), Briscoe started his own firm in 1912. From 1922 until 1926, he was in partnership with Sam H. Dixon, Jr. From 1919 until his retirement in 1955, Briscoe shared an office with Maurice J. Sullivan. Although from time to time he collaborated with both Dixon and Sullivan on nonresidential commissions, like the Petroleum Building, Briscoe was best known for his elegantly composed and detailed houses. His aptitude for disciplined formal composition and correct, scholarly rendition of historic detail placed him at the forefront of the eclectic trend in Houston architecture during the second decade of the twentieth century.

Briscoe's finest houses, designed between 1926 and 1940, exhibit the array of historical architectural styles characteristic of American eclectic architecture and are distinguished by the architect's gift for harmonious proportion and full-bodied ornamental detail.

Briscoe worked extensively in the Houston neighborhoods of Courtlandt Place, Shadyside, Broadacres, and River Oaks. Some of his buildings in Houston include:

- The Clayton Summer House, 3376 Inwood Drive (1924)
- The Underwood House, 2923 Del Monte Drive (1934)
- The Paddock House, 3229 Chevy Chase Drive (1936)
- The Johnson House, 3401 Sleepy Hollow Court (1936)
- The Fountain House, 2308 River Oaks Boulevard (1938)
- The Anderson House, 3414 Del Monte Drive (1938)

Briscoe joined the American Institute of Architects in 1921 and was elected a fellow of the institute in 1949. From 1934 until 1941, he served as district officer for South Texas of the Historic American Buildings Survey. He was the author of two western adventure novels, *In the Face of the Sun* (1934) and *Spurs from San Isidro* (1951). He died in Houston on September 18, 1971.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY

Exterior

The Petroleum Building at 1314 Texas Street is located at the northeast corner of Texas Street and Austin Street in downtown Houston. A square plan base and basement rises for two floors before converting to an asymmetrical tower from floors three through sixteen. The facades step back along the Texas and Austin Street sides, beginning with the seventeenth floor, creating progressively smaller floor

plates on floors seventeen through twenty-one, the highest occupiable floor. The step backs are treated as balconies on those floors. This treatment continues up to the twenty-second level where a much smaller floor plate is devoted exclusively to housing elevator equipment and other building service functions. The roof above the twenty-first level is primarily a flat roof with a small gabled, standing seam metal roof along the perimeter. The twenty-second level, limited to the area over the elevators and the elevator lobby, is capped by gabled, standing seam metal roofing.

The structural system is a hybrid design that contains a structural steel frame encased in rectangular concrete beams and columns. This system results in column-to-beam conditions where 2-way knee braces, formed in concrete, form column capitals. The steel emerges from the concrete to form the framing beneath the gabled roofs on the top floors.

Exterior walls are a masonry curtain wall construction with a mostly brick exterior finish, a limestone finish on the lower three floors, and a terra cotta tile frieze throughout. Windows are metal and primarily grouped in pairs of three on the four sides. Decorative trim and detailing on the lower three floors is the same stone as the wall finish. All trim above the bottom three floors is glazed terra cotta executed in a stylized Mayan motif. The terra cotta trim begins on the seventeenth floor and becomes more elaborate on the upper floors.

There is also a small, two-story, concrete framed parking garage on the southeast corner of the building. Its Austin Street façade exhibits similar brick and terra cotta frieze as that on the main building.

The north façade, Texas Street, and the east façade, Austin Street, are the primary facades and are similarly treated. They present a stacked block configuration. There are eight visible bays on each of the facades and two windows per bay in a configuration that extends from street to roofline. Floors one, two, and three form a base that begins with a 3' tall band of dark stone at the sidewalk, and continues up as a lighter stone, capped by a simple projecting stone cornice at the sills of the fourth-floor windows. Within this stone work, the first and second-floor windows were not originally divided into the eight bays, but were instead configured as four bays of metal storefront. The original storefront has been replaced by dark metal windows with dark tinted glass. Stone that closely matches the original light stone has been inserted to subdivide these bays to their current appearance. The original configuration is still marked by a series of small arches and corbels across the tops of the windows. The third-floor windows have been replaced with modern metal windows, but retain their original stone surrounds and detailing which includes a dented sill connecting two pairs of double windows each, stone arches over each window, supported by Corinthian columns and pilasters, and topped by recessed spandrel panels, trimmed in elaborate stone running trim and field detailing. There are medallions with Mayan face images in each recessed spandrel and a Mayan mask-like face in the field between the arches.

On floors four through seventeen, each bay has a pair of modern metal windows with tinted glass separated by a narrow brick mullion that runs uninterrupted the full height of the façade. Spandrels between each floor are recessed and feature detailed brick with simple terra cotta sills beneath each window. Beginning at the seventeenth floor, the parapet detailing includes glazed terra cotta panels containing medallions of Mayan images, pyramidal Mayan details above the parapet and large pyramids over the major corners. Farther up, the windows on the stepped-back facades are no longer separated by a brick mullion, but are instead mulled together with flatter arched tops and very elaborate glazed and colored terra cotta spandrels, jambs, and crowns. The terra cotta frieze in Mayan motif is very elaborate and exuberant.

The west and south elevations of the tower are less elaborate. They continue grouping windows in bays with recessed and detailed spandrels, but not all bays contain paired windows, with several being singles only. On the west façade, there are far fewer windows, with those that were originally in the elevator shafts having been removed and their openings filled with a similar brick.

Interior

On the interior, except for the basement, much of the original walls, doors, and ceiling construction has been removed and replaced with a modern gypsum board system. Original corridor configurations and general floor organization, however, are substantially intact. It is assumed that terrazzo floors in the hallways also remain beneath modern carpet. Some areas have had all original construction removed and provide a view of the structure and the unusual floor construction system of 2-way concrete joists with terra cotta tile infill. Most of the original elevator lobby walls, with Mayan detailing, remain.

Modifications

The first and second floor storefronts on the Texas and Austin facades have been removed and the openings subdivided. The original ground floor, marquis-style canopy across the entire Texas Street façade, along with the storefront behind and the primary entrance on the west end of this façade, have all been removed. The same treatment has been applied on the Austin side. The main entrance is now a revolving door of dark bronze aluminum with flanking single aluminum storefront doors. There is also a canvas awning protecting the main entrance. Projecting balconies at the seventeenth floor, shown on historic drawings and visible in historic photographs, were removed and replaced by the typical spandrel treatment sometime before 1964. All original double-hung wood windows were replaced in 1972 with dark bronze aluminum frames and single-pane, tinted glass. Green, glazed tile roofing has been replaced with standing seam metal roofing.

The building was purchased by Choice Hotels International in 2016 and will be redeveloped into a hotel.

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STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Landmark Designation of The Petroleum Building at 1314 Texas Street.

HAHC RECOMMENDATION

The Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends to City Council the Landmark Designation of The Petroleum Building at 1314 Texas Street.

EXHIBIT A
HISTORIC PHOTO
THE PETROLEUM BUILDING
1314 TEXAS STREET



EXHIBIT B
CURRENT PHOTO
THE PETROLEUM BUILDING
1314 TEXAS STREET



EXHIBIT C
SITE MAP
THE PETROLEUM BUILDING
1314 TEXAS STREET

